

Thomas Jefferson to William C. C. Claiborne, July 13, 1801, The Works of Thomas Jefferson in Twelve Volumes. Federal Edition. Collected and Edited by Paul Leicester Ford.

TO THE GOVERNOR OF THE MISSISSIPPI TERRITORY J. MSS. (WILLIAM C. CLAIBORNE.)

Washington, July 13, 1801.

Dear Sir, —You will receive from the Secretary of State a commission as governor of the Mississippi territory, an office which I consider of primary importance, in as much as that country is the principal point of contact between Spain and us, & also as it is the embryo of a very great state. Independent of the official communications, which the Secretary of State will make to you from time to time, I cannot deny myself a few words, private & confidential, the object of which will be to contribute to the shaping your course to the greatest benefit, of the people you are to govern, and of the U. S. and to your own best satisfaction. With respect to Spain our dispositions are sincerely amiable and even affectionate. We consider her possession of the adjacent country as most favorable to our interests, & should see, with extreme pain any other nation substituted for them. In all communications therefore with their officers, conciliation and mutual accommodation are to be mainly attended to. Everything irritating to be avoided, everything friendly to be done for them. The most fruitful source of misunderstanding will be the conduct of their and our people at New Orleans. Temper and justice will be the best guides through those intricacies. Should France get possession of that country, it will be more to be lamented than remedied by us, as it will furnish ground for profound consideration on our part,

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how best to conduct ourselves in that case. It would of course be the subject of fresh communications to you.

As to the people you are to govern, we are apprised that they are divided into two adverse parties, the one composed of the richer and better informed attached to the 1st grade of government, the other of the body of the people not a very homogeneous mass, advocates for the 2d grade which they possess in fact. Our love of freedom and the value we set on self-government disposes us to prefer the principles of the 2d grade, and they are strengthened by knowing they are [*faded*] by the will of the majority. While cooperation with that plan therefore is essentially to be observed, your best

endeavors should be exerted to bring over those opposed to it by every means soothing and conciliatory. The happiness of society depends so much on preventing party spirit from infecting the common intercourse of life, that nothing should be spared to harmonize and amalgamate the two parties in social circles. The great objection of the advocates for the 1st grade is the expense of the 2d. Everything should be done therefore to lessen that expense, and the legislative body the most expensive part of all our governments, should recommend themselves by making their particular expenses as light as possible. I shall consider it as the happiest proof that in our nomination I have done what was best for that state, if I should find that you shall have been able to reconcile parties to yourself and to one another. The only objection to you which has been strongly pressed, covers the allegation that you had taken your side too strongly with the one party to be able to become agreeable or just to the other. Had this been my opinion of you, the nomination would not have been made.

We have appointed Mr. Daniel Clarke at New Orleans our consul there. His worth and influence will aid you powerfully in the interfering interests of those who go, and who reside there. I take the liberty of recommending to your particular civilities & respect Mr. William Dunbar a person of great worth & wealth there, and one of the most distinguished citizens of the U. S. in point of science. He is a correspondent of mine in that line in whom

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I set great store. As a native of Britain he must have a predilection towards her; but as to every other nation he is purely American. I should think it fortunate could he be added to the friends of the 2d grade. I have hastily put together these few thoughts that you may understand our view and know what line of conduct on your part will be agreeable. I again repeat that they are meant to be private and confidential to yourself alone. I shall be glad to hear from you inofficially, when convenient, your official correspondence belonging to the Secretary of State. Accept assurances of my friendly esteem and great respect.